

Indian Camp

*There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem
Appareled in celestial light,*

*The glory and the freshness of a dream,
It is not now as it hath been of yore --
Turn wheresoe'er I may,
By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can see no more*

from "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood." William Wordsworth



The following is an excerpt from *Hemingway*. Kenneth S. Lynn. Simon & Schuster: New York, 1987.

Originally, "Indian Camp" contained some flashback material about young Nick going to church back home and singing a hymn about the breaking of the cord and then staying up all night reading *Robinson Crusoe*. But on reconsideration Hemingway cut this material, because he wanted his narrative to consist of nothing but a series of moment-moment events in a continuously unfolding present. And within each moment he adhered to a behavioristic mechanism of stimulus and response.

"Indian Camp" first appeared in print in the April 1924 issue of Ford Madox Ford's new magazine, the *transatlantic review*. By the time the ensuing summer was half over, so many readers had asked Hemingway whether the story was based on personal experience that he felt moved to declare that...."Nick in the stories was never himself [Hemingway]. He made him up. Of course he'd never seen an Indian woman having a baby. That was what made it good. Nobody knew that. He'd seen a woman having a baby on the road to Karagatch and tried to help her. That was the way it was."

In fact, Nick in "Indian Camp" was Hemingway, although not in the way that literal-minded readers assumed when they asked him about the laboring Indian woman he had seen in the woods in his childhood. A miracle of verbal compression, "Indian Camp" filters a remarkable amount of autobiographical emotion through its fictive events, from the closeness that the author had once felt to his father to his longtime dislike of his Uncle George to the fact that from a very young age he had always found something frightening in the trauma of childbirth. But a major portion of the inspiration for "Indian Camp" came from a less obvious cluster of emotions, all of which had been generated by the circumstances surrounding the birth of John Hadley Nicanor [Hemingway's first son]. The Indian husband in the upper bunk was Hemingway's symbolic equivalent of himself being handed a telegram on the train to Toronto. With his extraordinary capacity to visualize, he had apparently been able to imagine his wife in Wellesly Hospital almost as clearly as if he had been right there...suffering and swamped by a sense of helplessness at the realization that he would probably arrive too late to be of assistance to his wife's agony that he cannot bring himself to help her in any way, or even to watch the birth of his son; it is as if he were not really there, even though, terribly he is.

For modern readers...the ending of "Indian Camp" cannot help but be shadowed by the awareness that the real-life counterparts of the occupants of that boat on the lake would one day do away with themselves.